

Recruiting Indian Health Professionals

An IHS Ambassador Training Guide



*Working Together
to Build Healthy
Indian Communities*





OUR MISSION

To raise the physical, mental, social and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level.

OUR GOAL

To ensure that comprehensive, culturally acceptable personal and public health services are available and accessible to American Indian and Alaska Native people.

OUR FOUNDATION

To uphold the federal government's obligation to promote healthy American Indian and Alaska Native people, communities and cultures and to honor and protect the inherent sovereign rights of Tribes.



Finding the Right Candidates

The IHS Health Professions Recruitment team supports the recruitment of qualified health professionals to provide comprehensive, culturally competent care to American Indians and Alaska Natives. IHS health care practitioners enjoy meaningful, challenging work in their efforts to raise the physical, mental, social and spiritual health needs of Native people, many of whom experience significant health disparities at far higher rates than the general US population.

Today, more than 4,000 physicians, nurses, dentists and pharmacists, as well as 11,000 nutritionists, health administrators, behavioral health specialists, physical therapists, engineers, environmental health professionals and support staff deliver comprehensive care to culturally diverse communities nationwide. Indian health careers can be both exciting and challenging. Working within IHS and Tribal/Urban Indian facilities, health clinicians experience both professional and personal satisfaction. Many apply their broad public health experience and skillsets to future work in the federal health care arena, making IHS clinical practice a great starting point for a career in public health.

As an IHS Ambassador, your role entails working with candidates to assess whether their personal and professional interests translate to working in Indian health. Recruiting qualified health care providers to work within rural and remote Indian health communities is a significant challenge. IHS facilities are in desperate need of full-time, permanent physicians, dentists, nurses and pharmacists, as well as other professional disciplines. But some health professionals may not identify with the relaxed lifestyle and slower pace of American Indian and Alaska Native communities, particularly people who thrive on the hustle and bustle of a metropolitan setting. You can play a significant role in helping potential hires to recognize whether this type of living environment is right for them and will remain appealing throughout their career.

This guide is designed to help frame future recruiting discussions. It outlines the key aspects of IHS recruitment, describes how to promote the mission of IHS and its programs and explains how to ensure success in one's career. The underlying message being that an Indian health career is not just a profession but a way of life for those committed to serving the medically underserved.



IHS Career Paths

A career in Indian health offers clinicians an extraordinary opportunity to provide the highest level of comprehensive, patient-centered care. Indian health professionals share similar values and perspectives that set the stage for successful careers and fulfilling lives in small town, rural and even urban settings.

Clinicians have a choice of three distinct Indian health career paths. Each offers a unique way to set out on a chosen professional track. Each opportunity offers outstanding career rewards, competitive compensation and a comprehensive benefits package, based on level of training and experience.

CIVIL SERVICE

The federal civil service personnel system offers career flexibility and generous federal employee benefits. Because there are no age or physical requirements, the civil service is an attractive choice for experienced professionals and recent graduates alike.

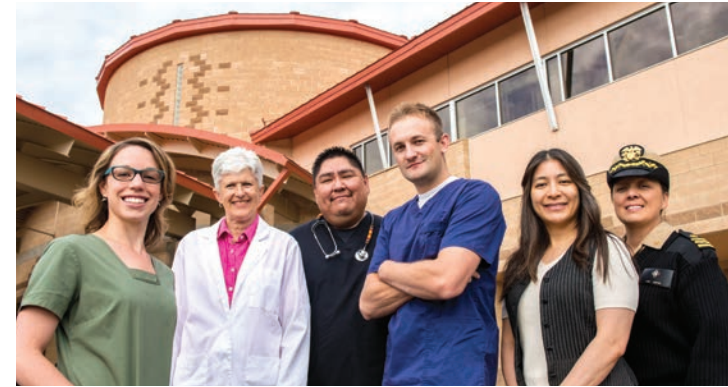
DIRECT TRIBAL HIRE

The majority of Indian health professionals are employed with one of the more than 560 federally recognized Tribes throughout the continental United States and Alaska. While certain Tribes will designate positions for employment through the federal system, many will advertise positions as direct Tribal hire through their local Human Resources department. These positions typically offer employment and benefits packages comparable to those of federal positions depending on the Tribe and the position.

Direct Tribal hires may offer employees more flexible work schedules that can be adjusted to meet individual needs. And in some instances, salaries can be adjusted to offer incentives in high-cost areas. All applications and negotiations of compensation, benefits and advancement must be handled with the specific Tribal HR departments with which the health professional is pursuing employment.

US PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE COMMISSIONED CORPS

The federal government also offers a career path through the Commissioned Corps of the US Public Health Service (USPHS). The USPHS is one of the seven uniformed services of the United States, however, it is not a branch of the armed forces. Health professionals interested in pursuing this path will serve as commissioned officers assigned to IHS for a minimum two-year service commitment.



VETERAN RECRUITMENT

Military veterans are another good source for Indian health professional talent. Those completing their service and using their GI Bill to continue their education represent a significant and growing pool of future IHS clinicians. Ambassadors should consider encouraging these candidates to explore the public health model and focus on working with underserved patient populations following graduation or completion of their clinical training.

Experienced clinicians with eight years of service or less will find exceptionally satisfying careers as USPHS Commissioned Corps officers. The Commissioned Corps allows former military personnel to regain their retirement where they left off. Two other options are to work for the federal civil service, which honors previous service toward retirement or to work directly for a Tribe and negotiate all salary and benefits directly with the Tribe at the time of hire.

Retention

The key to retaining good employees for the long term is to find the right candidates from the start. By working with potential hires early on in their job search to determine whether the position, facility, staff, community and lifestyle appeal to them and their families is job No. 1.

Work with them to address concerns or questions, such as:

- » Does the local area provide the type of lifestyle amenities they and their families seek?
- » Is there adequate support systems in place such as daycare and tutors?
- » Will family members have access to medical specialists or services nearby if needed?
- » And, most importantly, could they make the area their home?

Unanswered questions will only lead to dissatisfaction later on. The same goes for the work environment. An environment that creates a sense of belonging will motivate employees to stay. By focusing on the strategic management of personnel, including how staff members are treated and what can be done to make their work environment better, IHS can create a culture where people will want to stay for a long time, contribute to the overall team, make IHS their career and be critical players in a shared mission.

That team approach applies to all facets of clinical service and everyday life. IHS practitioners work alongside other dedicated providers to ensure comprehensive, culturally competent care that honors and complements the traditional beliefs of the community. Indian health communities embrace clinicians who devote time outside of their work to get involved in local events and recreational pursuits, as well as those who show an appreciation for the unique, culturally rich environment and heritage of the local Tribe.



Applying for an IHS Position

The following steps help potential hires determine whether an Indian health position will meet their preferred location and career needs.



PREPARING TO APPLY

Encourage them to:

- » Familiarize themselves with IHS and an Indian health career.
- » Research the three available career paths:
 - Federal civil service
 - Direct Tribal/Urban Indian program hire
 - US Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps
- » Contact an IHS Recruiter.
- » Assess Areas and facilities in need of providers in their health profession disciplines.
- » Determine if they are eligible to work in the facility and position.
- » Contact the clinical director or facility leader to arrange a site visit.
- » Apply for openings.

HOW TO APPLY

While **IHS Jobs** provides users access to current vacancies available through the Indian Health Service and some Tribal openings, **USAJOBS** posts federal employment vacancy notices and links for users to begin the application process. USAJOBS offers functions that make the application process less tedious, such as allowing applicants to create accounts and searchable resumes and upload documents including transcripts, diplomas and licenses. USAJOBS will also alert the applicant to new job postings that meet his or her search criteria.

Describe the steps below to potential hires to ensure they understand the process before applying.

- » Visit **IHS Jobs** to search current openings.
- » Submit all applications through **USAJOBS**.
- » Create an account to submit an application.
- » Create a resume on USAJOBS to capitalize on search functionality.
- » Upload the following documents to the applicant's profile:
 - Transcripts
 - Diplomas
 - Medical license.
- » Receive alerts for new job postings.

Note: Direct Tribal hire applicants must apply to the Tribal HR department of the Tribe with whom they seek employment.

The IHS Loan Repayment Program



Recognized as one of the most successful programs for both the recruitment and retention of health professionals, the **IHS Loan Repayment Program (LRP)** awards loan repayment to clinicians practicing in specific health profession disciplines in exchange for an initial two-year service commitment. Clinicians must work in health facilities serving American Indian and Alaska Native communities. The IHS LRP awards participants with up to \$40,000 for the repayment of their qualified loans in exchange for a service commitment.

The benefits are twofold: The LRP helps IHS to meet the staffing needs of Indian health programs while, at the same time, offers health professions graduates and current providers funding to repay their qualified student loans. This is in addition to a comprehensive salary and benefits package and a choice of three career paths. What's more, the LRP serves as a significant source for retaining clinicians by offering the option to annually extend participation for an additional year of service until a clinician's qualified loans are paid in full.

It's important to note that health professionals who apply to facilities with the greatest staffing needs in their health discipline will be the first priority in determining selections for LRP awards.

LRP SERVICE COMMITMENT

Physicians and other health professionals participating in the LRP must agree to serve a two-year service commitment providing full-time clinical service in an Indian health program in exchange for repayment of their approved health education loans. After completing the initial two-year contract, LRP participants may request (annually) an extension of their IHS LRP contract in exchange for an additional one-year service commitment until all qualified loans are paid.

AWARD

An initial LRP award can reach as high as \$40,000 paid over the first two years of service. New loan repayment awards are made in two annual installments. IHS will not deposit the second installment until the LRP branch receives employment verification. Awards are given for the repayment of qualified loans that include government and commercial loans used to pay for the participant's health education.



ELIGIBILITY

IHS LRP applicants must:

- » Be a US citizen.
 - Males 18 years or older must be registered for Selective Service.
- » Have a health profession degree or are in postgraduate training or in the final year of a health professions school.
- » Have a valid state license to practice in a health profession.
- » Be committed to practice at an Indian health facility.
- » Be ready to begin service on or before September 30 for two continuous years of full-time clinical practice.

Federal policy prohibits program participants from receiving financial support from two or more federally funded programs that require a service commitment. Examples include IHS scholarship recipients, NHSC loan repayment recipients, state loan repayment that is partially or fully funded with federal funds, etc.

While IHS encourages students completing their final year of academic or post-graduate clinical training/residency to apply for the LRP, they are not eligible to receive an award until they secure employment at a qualified facility and provide proof of licensure to the LRP office. We recommend that you encourage those who choose to apply to identify and begin applying for positions at specific facilities.

APPLICATION

Applications are accepted year round beginning October 1 through the Friday of the second full week of August and are evaluated monthly beginning in November or as soon as funds become available. Only complete applications will be reviewed. Notices of awards are mailed on the last business day of each month. The service period begins no later than September 30.

Interested candidates can access the online application at **www.ihs.gov/loanrepayment**.

EXTENDING PARTICIPATION

The LRP offers participants the opportunity to annually extend their contract until their qualified education loans are paid. Contract extension requests must be submitted by January 1 of the final year of a participant's service commitment to receive priority consideration. All others are subject to availability of funds.



LRP PARTICIPANT REQUIREMENTS

Full-time Clinical Practice

The IHS LRP defines full-time clinical practice as working a minimum of 80 hours every two-week period for an average of at least 40 hours per week. The 80 hours cannot be worked in less than seven days and no more than 12 hours of work can be performed in any 24-hour period. Time spent in on-call status will not count toward the 80 hours. Any hours worked over the required 80 hours per two-week period cannot be applied to any other workweek.

Annual Leave

No more than 35 workdays per contract year can be spent away from the practice for vacation, holidays, continuing professional education, illness or any other reason. All participants must abide by LRP policies, procedures and licensing requirements, even when working at Tribal or Urban Indian programs with less-stringent requirements regarding full-time clinical practice.

The IHS Scholarship Program



The **IHS Scholarship Program** provides qualified American Indian and Alaska Native health professions students an opportunity to establish an educational foundation for each stage of their pre-professional careers. IHS began providing scholarship support to American Indian and Alaska Native students to pursue health profession careers in 1978. The program has since grown to support, educate and place health care professionals within medically underserved Indian health programs throughout the continental United States and Alaska.

Today, nearly 7,000 American Indian and Alaska Native students have received scholarship awards and many have committed to serving their health profession careers at IHS; some have even returned to serve their own Tribal communities.

The IHS Scholarship Program is highly competitive and requires a proactive approach on behalf of the applicant to submit all of the required information when applying for any of our three scholarships: Preparatory, Pre-Graduate and Health Professions. Students should begin the process as soon as possible to take advantage of the resources available while completing their application. This educational foundation can pave the way for American Indian and Alaska Native students to pursue a health professions degree that will lead to a career in Indian health upon completion of their education and clinical training requirements. The online application and application cycle dates can be found on the **IHS Scholarship Program** website.

THREE SCHOLARSHIPS

Preparatory Scholarship — Available to qualified American Indian and Alaska Native undergraduate students who are pursuing courses to prepare for entry into a health professional school such as nursing, pharmacy and others. Recipients must be members or descendants of federally recognized, state-recognized or terminated Tribes.

Pre-Graduate Scholarship — Available to qualified American Indian and Alaska Native undergraduate students who are pursuing bachelor of science degrees in pre-professional areas such as pre-medicine, pre-dentistry, pre-podiatry and pre-optometry. Recipients must be members or descendants of federally recognized, state-recognized or terminated Tribes.

Health Professions Scholarship — Available to qualified American Indian and Alaska Native undergraduate and graduate-level students pursuing health professions degree programs, such as medicine, dentistry, nursing, pharmacy and others. Recipients must be members of federally recognized Tribes.



ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must:

- » Be a US citizen.
 - Males 18 years or older must be registered for Selective Service.
- » Provide verification of Tribal or Alaskan village membership status.
- » Have a minimum GPA of 2.0.
- » Be capable of completing a health professions course of study.
- » Be pursuing an eligible health profession degree program leading to a degree from an accredited health professions school within the United States.
- » Be willing to sign a contract to practice at an Indian health facility.
- » Intend to serve American Indians and Alaska Natives as a health care provider in his or her chosen health profession.

Federal policy prohibits program participants from receiving financial support from two or more federally funded programs that require a service commitment. Examples include IHS scholarship recipients, NHSC loan repayment recipients, state loan repayment that is partially or fully funded with federal funds, etc.

FINANCIAL AID

The program supports its recipients with financial aid covering the payment of tuition and required fees, including lab, health unit and parking permit fees, as well as a monthly stipend of up to \$1,500 to assist with additional education and living expenses. Pre-Graduate and Health Professions scholarship recipients can receive up to four years of full-time academic support or eight years of part-time support. Preparatory scholarship recipients can receive up to two years of full-time support or four years of part-time support.

APPLICATION

The IHS Scholarship Program application cycle is typically open annually from mid-December to the end of March. Applications are submitted online, but applicants are also required to mail an application packet with specific documentation supporting their application. Interested candidates can access the online application and the program's Application Handbook on the **IHS Scholarship Program** website.



SERVICE COMMITMENT

The IHS Scholarship Program contract is a commitment to serve within the Indian health system. Health Professions scholarship recipients agree to fulfill a service commitment as a full-time clinician in the health profession stated in their contract after graduation and/or completion of training. Recipients agree to provide one year of service for each year of scholarship support received (or the part-time equivalent) with a two-year minimum service period. The IHS Scholarship Program requires all recipients to begin fulfilling their service commitment through full-time clinical practice within 90 days of graduation from their degree program or post-graduate clinical training.

Direct candidates to the program website for comprehensive information about the three scholarships, priority degree programs, eligibility requirements and fulfilling a service commitment.

The IHS Extern Program

The IHS Extern Program is designed to give IHS scholars and other health professions students an opportunity to gain clinical experience with IHS and Tribal health professionals in their chosen discipline. The program also allows students the opportunity to work at sites they're considering for future employment after they complete their health professions training.

Supervised and mentored by health professionals, externs build confidence and accumulate valuable clinical hours.

Externships are open to scholars and non-scholars. Students are employed up to 120 days annually; most students work during the summer months.

Externships are available to health professions students who are:

- » US citizens.
- » Enrolled in a priority health profession degree program.
- » In good academic standing: Undergraduate with a 2.0 GPA or above; graduate students with a 3.0 GPA or above.



Learn More

Direct candidates to the following programs to learn more about IHS and the unique opportunities an Indian health career offers.

Indian Health Service Health Professions Support

801 Thompson Ave., TMP Suite 450A
Rockville, MD 20852
Phone: (301) 443-4242
Fax: (301) 443-1071
IHSRecruiters@ihs.gov
www.ihs.gov/careeropps



Indian Health Service Loan Repayment Program

801 Thompson Ave., TMP Suite 450A
Rockville, MD 20852
Phone: (301) 443-3396
Fax: (301) 443-4815
www.ihs.gov/loanrepayment

Indian Health Service Scholarship Program

801 Thompson Ave., TMP Suite 450A
Rockville, MD 20852
Phone: (301) 443-6197
Fax: (301) 443-6048
www.ihs.gov/scholarship





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Indian Health Service
Health Professions Recruitment

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The policy of the IHS is to provide absolute preference to qualified Indian applicants and employees who are suitable for federal employment in filling vacancies within the IHS. IHS is an equal opportunity employer.



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